

The Coming Season of Metropolitan Operas

A Disappointing Prospectus—Managerial and Popular Indifference to Art—French Opera To Be Sung in German.

By H. E. KREHBIEL.

THERE is nothing in the preliminary announcement which Mr. Gatti-Casazza issued last week to lead the lovers of the lyric drama to look forward with pleasurable anticipation to the next season of opera at the Metropolitan Opera House. Neither the company nor the repertoire is to be appreciably improved, and since there have been evidences of decay in both for several years, the outlook from an artistic point of view can only be described as gloomy. Whatever of cheer can be found in the prospect lies in the attitude of the public toward the institution, which may safely be said to insure another period of financial prosperity. The people who have been supporting the opera for the last few years are as smilingly indifferent to the promises of impresarios as love is reported to be to the perjuries of lovers. It is, indeed, becoming a matter of surprise that Mr. Gatti takes the trouble to make known his plans beyond the dates of the beginning and end of the season and the terms of subscription. His patrons need no other assurances. This is not because the artistic standard of repertoire and performance has been maintained on so high a plane that the subscribers are serenely confident of a realization of their expectations, but because those expectations have little or nothing to do with artistic standards. It is become a social duty on the part of some hundreds and a social ambition on the part of some thousands to be found in the boxes and stalls of subscribers, and that suffices for the hundreds and the thousands. The multitude must, perforce, be satisfied with what is offered. If its artistic hunger is left unappeased, the misfortune is not that of the Metropolitan Opera Company.

Operatic repertoires, if composed of the right kind of works, may get stale, but ought never to get old. The best operas in the Metropolitan list have already lived through a considerable portion of that period which is called immortality by easy-going critics and historians. Few of those which have died at the opera house since it was opened contained the germs of longevity. Some of those which have held a place there since their introduction would have been numbered with the dead long ago if they had not been the battle horses of two or three favorite singers. If these singers were not conscious of the fact that the tenure of their engagement was not independent of their repertoires, they might be more willing than they have shown themselves to be to extend and freshen up the list occasionally. But neither the management nor the public has pointed out such a need to them. Unlike the best of their operas, however, they are getting old, and the older they get, the less likely they will be to work for a large, varied and stable repertoire. "After us the deluge!" seems to be their motto, and the public seems to be willing that it shall also be the motto of the management. Small wonder if apprehension of dry-rot, decay and collapse fills the minds of observers really concerned about the future of the institution.

The Forthcoming Novelties and Revivals.

For the additions to the list promised by Mr. Gatti next season we are beholden to Mme. Barrientos, Miss Farrar and Signor Martinelli, of the Italian and French contingent, and, probably, to Mr. Bodansky and the undivulged German forces. The first group of singers are not strong reeds to lean upon, speaking from the point of view of sound art, nor is there a guarantee of permanent enjoyment in the opera which their presence will make possible. "Lakmé" is to be brought back for trial after vicissitudes which make its history in New York more diverting than interesting. "L'Elisir d'Amore" is to be revived, but with it will come thoughts of the untimeliness of the house for a work of its kind, and memories of a past which cannot be restored, and for which Mme. Barrientos cannot offer a recompense. Will Miss Farrar outstrip Miss Garden and Lina Cavalieri in the character of Thais? It is not likely. As for Massenet's opera, though it was one of Mr. Hammerstein's triumphs at the Manhattan Opera House (it had seven performances in his second season, seven in his third and six in his last), there was M. Renaud to help it and, as The Tribune's reviewer remarked after its first production, the opera rests for its success on the kind of argument which Phryne, of classic story, presented to her austere judges.

Of the two novelties promised one, Zandonai's "Francesca da Rimini" is a year old and the other, Gluck's "Iphigénie en Tauride," 136 years older. If the classic opera is given—and the likelihood is greater in its case than in that of any of the other real or quasi-novelties—it will have only one rival in age in what may be called the active list—the same composer's "Orfeo." New York had a fleeting meeting with the talent of Zandonai when his "Conchita" was produced here three seasons ago by the Philadelphia Opera Company. That pale reflection of "Carmen" did not create a consuming interest in the composer, but some of his music heard since has led to the hope that he may prove a worthy companion at least of Puccini and Montemezzi.

His opera is a setting of d'Annunzio's drama which was thought worthy of translation by so excellent a poet as Arthur Symonds. Who will create here the part of the heroine? That question is on the knees of the gods and the impresarios of New York and Chicago. Señora Bori, probably, if she should be restored in voice next season. The hero's part is destined for Signor Martinelli.

Gluck's "Iphigénie en Tauride" is a French opera, but it is to be performed in German and with the improvements (let us hope they are such) made by Richard Strauss. Meanwhile it is not a strange circumstance that puts a French classic into the category of the Russian operas which have found a place in the Metropolitan list? It was not to be expected that "Boris Godounoff" and "Prince Igor" would be sung by the Metropolitan company in Russian, and perhaps the choice of Italian was the logical sequence. But why not sing a French opera in French? Or, if not in French, why not in English? The German singers of the Metropolitan would no doubt be able to master the English tongue sufficiently for operatic purposes, and the libretto of "Iphigénie," derived by Gluck's librettist, Guillard, from Euripides through de la Touche, would no doubt sound as well in English as in German if made by a competent translator. The opera book is not of the old-fashioned Italian order. We

Soloists at the Open-Air Performance of Verdi's Requiem Next Sunday Afternoon.

MISS LUCILE LAWRENCE.

GIOVANNI ZENATTELO.



LEON ROTHIER.

MISS MARIA GAY.

at the Metropolitan Opera House had come to an end in the spring of 1890 that Abbey and Grau took the theatre for a short season of Italian opera by the troupe headed by Patti. In that season "Lakmé" was sung once—on April 2, 1890. It was not an altogether happy occasion. Mme. Patti sang the "Bell song" brilliantly, of course, but somehow or another she did not seem wholly to fit the part, and at the end of the lovely duet between Lakmé and Mallika, Mme. Fabbrì, who sang with the diva, went to pieces.

When Abbey and Grau resumed the management of the Metropolitan Opera House in 1891 Marie Van Zandt was one of their sopranos, and for her "Lakmé" was revived on February 22. Mr. Abbey had great expectations, but they ended in disappointment. There was metal more attractive in both the personnel of the company and the repertoire. It was the year of Emma Eames's coming, and also of Jean de Reszke's (the two sang together in "Roméo et Juliette"), and "Cavalleria Rusticana" was new. Then Delibes's opera slept fifteen years, when the presence of Mme. Sembrich in the company led to its revival. It was sung three times in the season of 1906-'07. The opera was one of the surprises provided by Mr. Hammerstein for the patrons of his Manhattan Opera House in his last season. Five days before the close of that season—the date was March 21, 1910—"Lakmé" was precipitated on the stage for a single performance in order, evidently, to give Mme. Tetrazzini a chance to sing the "Bell song." Mr. McCormack was the Gerald of the occasion. Altogether we knew of no more singular history than that lived by this opera in New York.

Finally, there is to be an opera in English by Reginald De Koven. George W. Chadwick and Charles Martin Loeffler are two American composers who have completed opera scores in their desks.

News of the Music and Concert World.

The Park Music Committee of the Music League of America, headed by Pasquale Amato and counting among its members Mme. Melanie Kurt and Messrs. Johannes Sembach, Ernest Schelling and Giovanni Martinelli, yesterday decided to continue its successful efforts of last year to combat the low park music appropriation of the

Board of Estimate, and to arrange and give free park concerts in cooperation with the Park Department.

The innovation free park concerts, consisting of vocalists and instrumentalists with piano accompaniment, will be given again. Announcement of the first open-air concert will soon be made.

"Last year," said Mme. Kurt, of the Metropolitan Opera Company, speaking for the committee, "to offset the decreased appropriation, the Music League, in cooperation with the Park Department, gave free concerts in New York and in Brooklyn, among others in Central Park, Winthrop, Thompson, Sunset and Mount Morris parks. In Brooklyn, at one concert, there were over 6,000 persons present. We see no reason why the poor people of New York should be deprived of their music this year. For this reason we have gone into the work again."

"Borough President Marks, Cabot Ward and Louis Fehr, of the Park Department, and the newspapers gave their support to the movement last year and helped greatly to bring about a successful season of concerts. We trust we will receive similar and even stronger support this year, to offset the unnecessary economy, which affects the pleasure of thousands."

"First of all, artists are needed who will volunteer to sing and play. We already have a number of these, but there are always more needed. Where can artists gain as much satisfaction in playing as by knowing that they are giving their art to a worthy cause?"

"We also need pianos. Through the courtesy of a piano company we were furnished these gratuitously last year, but that can hardly be expected this year if we decide to take up the matter to a greater extent. Some funds are necessary."

"We hope to show the city's Board of Estimate that it ought to provide for these concerts, make them a permanent feature and give them the full support they deserve. The committee will be glad to receive any suggestions which may be offered."

Through the generosity of Elkan

Naumburg the Park Department is enabled to announce six concerts to be given in Central Park, on the Mall, on May 30, June 11 and 25, July 4, August 13 and September 4. Franz Kaltenborn has been secured to lead the orchestra at these concerts, and the programme will embrace the works of the classic as well as those of modern composers. The first concert of the season of 1916 will be held on Memorial Day, May 30, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

Enter the grand opera "movie." Victor Herbert has for the last eight months been devoting his time to the score for a motion picture. Hitherto the musical scores of even the most spectacular motion pictures have been borrowed bit by bit from well known compositions and patched together by the musical director. Thomas Dixon's "A Fall of a Nation," the twelve-reel film, is to be produced by the National Drama Corporation at the Liberty Theatre, beginning on Monday evening, June 5, is to have original music by Mr. Herbert.

Mr. Herbert's operatic score is for a full orchestra of seventy pieces. He will himself conduct at the opening performance.

"Although I have been called the first man to accept such a novel commission," says Mr. Herbert, "as a matter of fact, the undertaking is not entirely unprecedented, for has not Humperdinck, in Europe, written an original score of the 'Sister Beatrice' film? As a drama dealing with the origin and destiny of the American republic, 'The Fall of a Nation' has a special appeal to me. I find in it all the elements of grand opera—there is the tragedy of a great nation's fall, the glory of its resurrection, and a potent love story turning on the splendid faith of the country's women in its hours of despair."

This afternoon Samuel A. Baldwin, professor of music at the College of the City of New York, will give his 500th public organ recital at the Great Hall, City College. After the recital a committee of citizens, who for years have enjoyed these excellent concerts, will present Professor Baldwin with a bronze tablet and a testimonial as a humble token of their regard and esteem. Dr. Sidney Mezes, the president of City College, will act as chairman, and Dr. John H. Finley, State Commissioner of Education, will make the presentation.

The commencement exercises of the Institute of Musical Art will take place at Aeolian Hall on Thursday evening, June 1.

VERDI AT POLO GROUNDS

Requiem Mass to Be Performed by Choral Societies.

The Polo Grounds, on next Sunday afternoon, will be the scene of an open-air performance of Verdi's Requiem Mass, which will be offered by the foremost choral societies of New York City, Newark and adjacent cities, to the number of 1,200, while the orchestra, of which the New York Philharmonic in its entirety will form the nucleus, will include 120 musicians.

Miss Lucile Lawrence will be the soprano, Giovanni Zenatello the tenor, Maria Gay the contralto, and Leon Rothier the bass.

The production is under the direction of Louis Koenenich, the conductor of the New York Oratorio Society, the Mendelssohn Glee Club and the Beethoven Society. He will be assisted by Oscar Spireanu, late conductor of the Royal Opera in Bucharest.

The stage is more properly a monster stand of graduated levels, on which the chorus will be placed in tiers, and the orchestra and soloists occupy the foreground, the soloists and the conductor being provided with separate elevations.

The dimensions in floor space of this structure must be 7,500 square feet to accommodate the chorus. Approximately, the stand will measure 50x150 feet, and 100,000 feet of lumber will be required to build it.

The requiem was first performed May 22, 1874, at St. Mark's Church in Milan, on the first anniversary of Manzoni's death. Verdi conducted in person, the orchestra being comprised of 100 and the chorus of 120. Soloists were Mme. Stolz and Waldmann and Signori Capponi and Maini.

In order to afford thousands of others, disappointed because of the restricted capacity of St. Mark's Church, opportunities to hear the mass, Verdi permitted it to be performed three times at La Scala, conducting the first of this series of performances himself. Several numbers were encoored, and more than once the audience rose en masse, crying "Viva Verdi!"

Paris heard the mass that same year at the Salle Favart "Matinée Spirituelle." It had a memorable initial performance in England at Royal Albert Hall in London the following year, with an orchestra of 150 and a chorus of 500. Verdi conducted. Since then it has been performed in the foremost musical centres with tremendous success.

Yvette Guilbert Plans Novel School and Salon

Aims to Fill New York's Artistic Want of a Common Meeting Place for Artists, Scientists and Literary Men and Women.

Mme. Yvette Guilbert has accomplished many interesting things in her life, but none will be more interesting or more valuable than the one she has now in view. Mme. Guilbert plans to found in New York a combined school and salon, something which not even France now possesses, but which the French disease feels confident America, if it be but given the chance, will welcome. Mme. Guilbert when she came to this country last year had no idea of the enthusiasm of the reception which was to be hers. In her memory was the scar of the abominable treatment she had received from the vaudeville audiences of a number of years before. Although she knew she was not to appear again before audiences of that type, she scarcely dreamed of the popular success which was to be hers. She came to America as a sort of missionary for French song. Finding that the people are already converted, she intends to remain to establish a centre where may be gathered and taught the spirit of the two races, two races so different, yet so necessary one to the other. It is the French artist's belief that the great artistic want in New York is that of a common meeting place for artists, scientists and literary men and women. A young and ardent spirit is left alone, unless through a rare combination of events he is admitted to a few houses, where probably he finds only boredom. But a real artistic salon America does not possess—and this is what Mme. Guilbert wishes her school to be. All she needs is a building large enough to serve as a home for her project, and it for this that she appeals to the millionaires of America. As she herself says: "God knows there is enough money foolishly given to found a hundred such schools as mine! Look at your Century Theatre! Yet my project will cost little and mean much. And, do not fear, I am the type of woman to make it a success."

No one who could have heard Mme. Guilbert utter these words would have for a moment doubted that power. The vitality, the enthusiasm she displays upon the stage were there in concentrated force.

"My school will be devoted to the teaching of diction, both French and English; song interpretation and acting," said Mme. Guilbert. "Clear, musical diction is the first requisite for either the concert or dramatic stage, yet how little attention is paid to it in America! Then, as to song interpretation, it is extraordinary how little is known either in England or America of the vast wealth of folk song produced in England. These songs are very beautiful and ought to be the heritage of every child. I shall make a particular effort to teach these. Of course French songs will be another element imparted. In the teaching of these I feel a great deal more is taught either than the mere song or its most effective method of interpretation—for in a nation's folk-songs more than anywhere else is found the soul of that nation. In the study, then, of English and French song we bring to life the spirit which animates the two races and by mutually understanding them forge another link in the chain that should bring together our two literatures and languages. As to the teaching of acting, I hardly think any one will contradict me when I say it is in America most urgently needed. You have in your actresses great potential talent; some of my best pupils in Paris have been Americans, but you have no school where a correct knowledge of how to use that talent can be properly learned."

"But there will be another feature of the school which I hope will prove fully as important. I intend to have an afternoon or two a week, or an evening, set apart for the meeting of men and women who ought to meet but who under the present circumstances have no chance. If, for instance, a young unknown poet writes a fine poem I want to be able to write to him and ask him to one of these gatherings, whether I know him or not. Here he will meet other poets, musicians, painters and literary men. Instead of being lonely in this great city he will be able to know kindred spirits, many of them prominent in the artistic world. In this way he will be encouraged and his mind and spirit enriched."

"I also intend to invite prominent Frenchmen, artists, poets, scientists, politicians, to visit me and add their presence to the attractiveness of these gatherings. I know every one in the artistic and political world of France, and many of these men and women would be glad to visit me in order to strengthen the bond that binds the two countries. At present they do not come because they do not wish to stay in hotels and among strangers. My house would be to them a home; in it they would find the atmosphere that they love, and in it they would meet ardent spirits to whom they can give much and from whom they can receive not a little."

"The boredom of the usual drawing-room is intolerable. What do people do there and what do they talk about? No wonder intelligent men flee from the afternoon tea as from the plague! If there were one place in New York where people were sure of meeting interesting people, hearing interesting conversation, and, above all, of being sure that each person would feel perfectly easy, I feel sure that place would become popular beyond all dreams. It is such a salon I intend founding. I have been warned that it will be impossible to break down the barriers of ice that are supposed to incase all gatherings of Anglo-Saxons! I assure you that when I am present there will be neither ice nor barriers!"

"What I must have is a house ample

enough to house my school, and it is for such a house that I make my appeal to the generosity of the Americans. What I can offer in return will amply repay the small outlay required. In America I intend to make my home. "I know that there will be many who will doubt the possibility of success in such an undertaking as mine. There always are such doubters. In Paris, where a number of years ago, in an address before a number of women, I urged that the rich women of France and the great dressmakers should send me their last season's gowns in order that I might sell them at a nominal price to the poor actresses of the French stage, I was told that it was a beautiful idea but utterly impracticable. Yet what was the result? Since 1904 the society I founded has sold to the actresses of France two million francs' worth of gowns, the creations of Paquin, Worth, Poiret and all the other great dressmakers. These gowns have been given to me gratis and sold to the actresses at ten francs each. The donors of these gowns have included many of the nobility and even royalty of France, and the charity has been of enormous value. You know in France, as probably elsewhere, a young actress can rarely obtain even a trial unless she is properly gowned, and the actress is only, alas! too often forced to secure these clothes at the risk of much that is dear to her. My success here was due entirely to my faith in myself and my work. I feel sure that given an equal chance I shall succeed here in my new venture."

VERNAICULAR OPERA

Mr. Reginald De Koven Has Opinions on the Subject.

Reginald De Koven, whose opera, "The Canterbury Pilgrims," is to be produced next season at the Metropolitan Opera House, is naturally interested in the subject of "opera in English," but, unlike some of the super-enthusiasts in that cause, he does not believe that the Metropolitan Opera House should be the home of opera in English translations. Mr. De Koven, like Mr. Gatti-Casazza, firmly believes that the Metropolitan Opera House is unique in being able, through its company, to give operas in the language in which they were written and that when it is possible to give operas in this way it should by all means be done. On the other hand, he equally firmly believes that every American city should have an opera house where operas should be given in English.

"The Metropolitan Opera House, with that of Covent Garden in London, holds a peculiar place in the operatic world," said Mr. De Koven recently. "Through its huge company of artists of all nationalities it is enabled to give most of its performances in the original language. I realize that this is the most perfect, the most luxurious, method of producing opera, and I should be the last person desirous of seeing the Metropolitan Opera Company change its policy. I know, and the world knows, that at the Metropolitan are given the world's finest productions. But, except in the case of the Metropolitan, this policy is less successful. The audiences at the Metropolitan are cosmopolitan; most of the subscribers know several languages, and they would resent the intrusion of translations; but among the great mass of the people this is true."

"In Europe the opera-goers demand their operas to be given in the vernacular, and the great mass of the American public, knowing no language but English, naturally wishes to understand, likewise, what is in progress. Yet even here there is a fallacy very generally current. Mr. Gatti-Casazza said to me only the other day: 'The American public seems to think that it must understand every word that is sung if the opera is sung in English. On the other hand, an Italian audience considers itself lucky if it catches 50 per cent of the words.' Now, this is a just criticism. It is impossible for any singer to make himself or herself perfectly understood, but if an audience gets half what is sung it will get the story and the emotion. We must not ask in America for things which would be impossible even in Europe."

"The charge that English as a language is unsingable is ridiculous. I myself believe that next to Italian it is the best language for song. Two things, however, are necessary—singers trained for clear diction and librettists who know how to write singable English. As to the former, the case of Bonci comes immediately to my mind. Several years ago I asked him to sing some English songs at a concert in Carnegie Hall. He replied that he knew no English. I urged him, none the less, to try, and he agreed. What was the result? At that concert Bonci, a man who knew no English, sang so that nearly every word was understood, while American singers mumbled and jumbled words most appallingly. It was simply the case of a singer trained in Italian diction being able to sing equally clearly in another language."

"Then the librettist must know his business. English is an exceedingly beautiful as literary efforts, have failed simply because their authors knew nothing of the requirements for song. I think this will be found not to be the case in the libretto Mr. MacKaye has written for 'The Canterbury Pilgrims.'"